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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001054

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SUBJECT: UNAMI WILL PROPOSE GOI-KRG "TASK FORCE" TO
NEGOTIATE ARAB-KURD ISSUES FOLLOWING RELEASE OF ITS REPORTS
ON DISPUTED INTERNAL BOUNDARIES AREAS

REF: BAGHDAD 1012

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns John Fox; reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) Summary: UNAMI's SRSG de Mistura, accompanied by POLMIN Ford and European representatives, will propose to KRG President Barzani April 17 the establishment of a high level "Task Force" to take concrete actions on Arab-Kurd issues identified in UNAMI's draft reports on Kirkuk and the other disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) areas. Preliminary meetings with other Kurdish officials, including President Talabani and FM Zebari, indicate the Kurds want to see a concrete political process and a transitional administration in Kirkuk leading to a referendum. UNAMI has cautioned that any referendum should be one that confirms a political agreement between GOI and KRG leaders. De Mistura was positively surprised that Maliki welcomed further UNAMI facilitation in his April 12 briefing for the PM. We have heard a similar apparently constructive reaction from senior Maliki advisor Sadiq al-Rikabi. End summary.

12. (C) POLMIN met with SRSG Staffan de Mistura April 16 to receive a read-out of UNAMI's briefings for PM Maliki and President Talabani on their DIBs reports and to discuss strategy for the April 17 presentation to KRG President Barzani. Deputy SRSG Andrew Gilmour and UNAMI officials Peter Bartu, Elpida Rouka, and Adam Hinds participated, as did MNF-I DCG LTGEN Brown, Senior Advisor for the North Vrooman, and Poloff Cassidy. Gilmour and Bartu had met with S/A Vrooman and Cassidy the day before.

Maliki Cautiously Welcoming of UNAMI Efforts

13. (C) De Mistura said he was pleasantly surprised that, in their April 12 meeting, Maliki had given a "green light" to the idea of a political process emerging from release of the UNAMI reports. De Mistura said the UN will take advantage of this, even if it was only a tactical ploy by Maliki to stretch out consideration of DIBs issues until closer to the national elections, when he can campaign as defender against Kurdish ambitions. Although the UN has not shared with any of the parties the full reports, they briefed their four latest suggested options for the future administrative status of Kirkuk. Maliki expressed a preference for Kirkuk to be a standalone region with substantial local autonomy but no ties to the KRG, although he did not entirely reject UNAMI's "dual nexus" proposal for a Kirkuk Region that has administrative ties to both Baghdad and Erbil (surprising de Mistura). Sadiq al-Rikabi, a senior advisor to Maliki who participated in the PM's meeting with UNAMI, echoed his boss' new approach on the need to settle Arab-Kurd disputes, in bilateral discussions with POLMIN.

Talabani Stresses need for Transitional Period Leading
to Kirkuk Referendum

14. (C) De Mistura's April 15 meeting with President Talabani went well enough. Talabani said "there is no daylight" between his position and Barzani's on DIBs. He nevertheless counseled de Mistura on how to manage Barzani, insisting that the reports mention Article 140 and identifying UNAMI's options for Kirkuk as "transitional" arrangements leading to a referendum in 3-5 years. De Mistura commented that it is obvious that Talabani and Barzani are focused on the obvious that Talabani and Barzani are focused on the political consequences of their DIBs positions in the upcoming KRG elections, noting, for example, that Talabani had returned to Suleimaniya in order to have De Mistura brief him in the KRG where he wears his PUK hat as well. He said Talabani welcomed the idea of a small Task Force to negotiate key issues following release of the reports.

UNAMI Asks USG Support for Task Force Proposal to Masoud
Barzani

15. (C) FM Zebari called on de Mistura the evening of April 15 to offer similar advice for the briefing to Masoud Barzani. De Mistura told POLMIN it was a good sign that Zebari did not find the range of UNAMI proposals "outrageous" (a concern of theirs). Zebari counseled de Mistura that the Kurds would be looking for some mention of Article 140 in

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their reports (it is there, in one of the two proposals for Kirkuk that UNAMI officials see as a less likely outcome but that they inserted to "protect the process." To ensure a positive meeting with Barzani, Zebari said it would be important to acknowledge Kurdish suffering, use the word "transitional" to describe its recommendations, acknowledge Sinjar District's "special status" as a homogenous Kurdish-speaking area surrounded by Arab areas, and indicate plans for a concrete follow-on political process. De Mistura was able to reassure Zebari that all of those things would be part of his Friday presentation in Erbil. Zebari also warned de Mistura he should not give the impression of too much consultation with the Turkish government, which the Kurds do not fully trust. De Mistura told us that he thinks Turkey will be an important "supporter" of the "Friends of the DIBS" - which will comprise the UN, U.S. and EU.

16. (C) UNAMI officials have spent considerable time strategizing on their own and with us in advance of the briefing to Masoud on April 17. De Mistura told POLMIN he would need vigorous USG support for his pitch to Masoud to empower a senior Kurdish official to negotiate with the GOI on a small task force, potentially only 2-4 people each designated by the Prime Minister and the KRG. POLMIN countered that Sunni Arabs would need to be represented somehow, since the conflicts along the DIBs line (as opposed to the constitutional disputes) are chiefly between Sunni Arabs and Kurds, and the PM would not be able to "deliver them." De Mistura admitted the point, but said the Task Force would have to be very small to have any hope of success and Sunni Arab hardliners like Osama Alnujaifi would have to be excluded (as would Kurdish hardliners). De Mistura believes that Maliki is discomfited by the Alnujaifi brothers, not just because they are former Ba'athists, but because they are his political rivals as defenders of Arabs against the Kurds. UNAMI plans to brief the two VP's and then share the DIBS report with the 3 1 1 on April 22. De Mistura anticipates that these senior leaders will need at least ten days to digest the reports and to offer factual corrections to UNAMI (which does not plan to publish the reports). UNAMI will brief other select audiences (e.g., COR

members of relevant committees) and some provincial leaders (in Mosul April 25, in Kirkuk April 30) before the end of the month.

17. (C) Comment: De Mistura seeks to move aggressively to establish a focused, high-level follow-on political process to facilitate real Kurd-Arab negotiations that will survive his departure, but details are still unresolved, partly because there are many interests to accommodate and partly because it is not clear yet what the parties will accept. Consistent with policy guidance from Washington, we are offering robust support to UNAMI's efforts, in close cooperation with MNF-I, and will continue to engage wiQ('tf"+2 hoQQGx|zJ%9];P*ces on facilitating voluntary and sustainable returns, citing the President,s Camp Lejuene speech and recent discussion with Prime Minister Maliki. PMIN re-iterated the President,s commitment to help Iraq address displacement. PMIN urged the GOI to revitalize its own efforts through greater coordination and organization initiated from the highest levels of government. Essawi thanked PMIN for US support in this crucial matter and conveyed his own personal commitment in addressing displacement issues.

13. (C) Senior Coordinator explained that the USG is currently looking at ways to better direct international assistance where it is most needed to create an environment conducive for voluntary returns. He noted IOM figures showing 300,000 returns in 2008 and UN expectations for larger numbers in 2009. Senior Coordinator credited MODM with disbursing stipends to IDPs and some progress on payments to returnees, but noted that the Ministry did not have the capacity or mandate to substantially facilitate returns. Needs assessments conducted by UNHCR, IOM and NGOs all list security, employment, housing and the availability of essential services as the most important considerations for IDPs and refugees in deciding whether to return, none of which MODM has control over. In contrast, the DPM, with his authority over essential services does have authority to coordinate GOI efforts in some important areas. Senior Coordinator commented that there was a need for greater GOI effort, coordination and credibility in addressing the needs of the displaced and supporting returns, and asked whether Essawi could play a bigger role.

14. (C) Essawi characterized MODM Minister Sultan as protective of his role as GOI lead on IDPs and refugees, saying he had rebuffed earlier suggestions from the DPM and from other ministers for greater cooperation. Essawi declared that this was no longer acceptable and said he would ask Sultan to meet him next week to discuss approaches and programs. He instructed his staff to obtain MODM,s displacement and return data, which showed where displacement and returns were concentrated and would be of use in Qand returns were concentrated and would be of use in targeting services. Essawi acknowledged that jobs were a critical factor for returnees, but said that the tight GOI budget had led to a GOI-wide hiring ban. Job creation would have to come from the private sector, the prospects for which were not promising in the near term.

15. (C) Asked by Senior Coordinator about IDP/refugee participation in national elections, Essawi replied that improving participation of IDPs and creating a mechanism for absentee voting for refugees were essential. But he noted that some in the government wanted to keep the sectarian map as it is and had little interest in returns or political participation by the displaced. He added that Iraq,s political map had become fluid and commented that the gains Maliki,s party had made in provincial elections may ultimately prove to be a mixed blessing for the PM. Essawi observed that inexperience of the new governors and provincial councils, very limited resources, a poor economy and fragile security situation may set the stage for a voter backlash in national elections. Essawi made little secret of his desire to see such an outcome.

16. (C) With regard to his playing a prominent, public role, in leading GOI efforts to facilitate returns, Essawi

commented that the PM was wary of anyone attempting to assert